DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 395 PS 016 066

AUTHOR Rothlein, Liz; Brett, Arlene
TITLE Children's, Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Play.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Attitudes; *Parent Attitudes; *Play; *Preschool Curriculum; Preschool Education; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A total of 103 children 2 through 6 years of age were interviewed and 73 of their parents and 60 preschool teachers completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of play. Most parents defined play as something for fun or amusement, while teachers saw it both as fun and as an opportunity for cognitive and social development. Both parents and teachers said they promoted play by providing a variety of materials and parents also said they played with their children. The majority of teachers did not view play as an integral part of the curriculum, but instead described a learn/play dichotomy. Parents did not support the idea of a large amount of time in preschool being spent in play. Children's favorite play activities according to children and their parents and teachers were outdoor play, dramatic play, blocks, and art activities. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED273395

Children's, Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Play

Liz Rothlein and Arlene Brett

University of Miami

PS 016066

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Liz Rothlein
Arlene Brett
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running head: Perceptions of Play

Dr. Liz Rothlein
School of Education and Allied Professions
University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida 33124

Abstract

Children two through six years of age were interviewed and their parents and preschool teachers completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of play. Most parents defined play as something for fun or amusement, while teachers saw it both as fun and as an opportunity for cognitive and social development. Both parents and teachers said they promoted play by providing a variety of materials and parents also said they played with their children. The majority of teachers did not view play as an integral part of the curriculum, but instead described a learn/play dichotomy. Parents did not support a large amount of time in preschool being spent in play. Children's favorite play activities according to children and their parents and teachers were outdoor play, dramatic play, blocks, and art activities.

Children's, Teachers' and Parents Perceptions of Play

Thousands of years ago Greek philosophers Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) recognized the importance of play in the overall development of the individual. Other early educators such as John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) stressed the importance of play as well.

Frederich Froebel, often considered the father of the kindergarten, described the importance of play in the development of children in the following statement:

> Play is the purest most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and at the same time, typical of human life as a whole - of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world (Harris, 1906).

Most early childhood educators recognize the importance of play, but there has been some disagreement about the definition of play and the specific benefits derived from play. To illustrate the variety of definitions, Mitchell and Mason (1948) provide the following collection:

> Spencer (1873): "Superfluous actions taking place instinctively in the absence of real actions ... Activity performed for the immediate gratification derived, without

regard for ulterior benefits. "

Schiller (1875): "The aimless expenditure of exuberant energy."

Froebel (1887): "The natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood."

Groos (1898): "Instinctive practice, without serious intent, of activities that will later be essential to life."

Patrick (1916): "A person's need for relaxation as a relief from mental fatigue."

Gurlick (1920): "What we do because we want to."

Dewey (1922): "Activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves."

There are numerous references in the literature to play as the basis of young children's learning (Cheyne and Rubin,1983; Piaget, 1962; Tway, 1983). Play has been linked to creative thinking, problem solving, ability to cope with tensions and anxieties, acquiring new understanding, ability to use tools, and development of language (Christie and Johnson, 1983). Play has also been found to be a way to motivate children to explore new materials and ideas and to remain on task longer (Iverson, 1982).

The purpose of this study was to survey teachers', parents', and children's ideas about play and to determine if their perceptions and practices do in fact reflect what the literature says about play.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 103 preschool children, 73 parents, and 60 teachers of preschool children. The sample was drawn from private and public preschools and child care centers of a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds in Dade County, Florida. The children's ages ranged from two to six years.

Procedure

Three questionnaires were developed to gather data about play from preschool children and their teachers and parents. All three questionnaires were open-ended, with answers being supplied by the respondents. Teachers and parents were asked to define play and tell what they did to promote or encourage play. Teachers were questioned about how they included play in the curriculum and what kinds of things interfered with play. Parents were asked what percentage of time they thought children should play in school and why. The children's questions included "What do you think of when I say the word play?" and "What do you do when you are not playing?" Teachers, parents and children were all asked about children's favorite play activities and materials.

The questionnaires were distributed to parents and teachers by students enrolled in early childhood education courses at the University of Miami and collected two weeks later. The same

students interviewed each of the 103 preschool children, using the children's questionnaire. The childrens' responses were recorded by the interviewers. Answers from all three groups of responses were tabulated and categorized by the researchers.

Results

Both parents' and teachers' definitions of play included enjoyment, fun, or some type of amusement; social development; a learning or cognitive activity; physical activity and use of muscles; creativity and imagination; non-structured activity; preparation for future roles, and child's work. As can be seen in Table 1, the largest category of parent responses was play as fun or amusement, whereas teachers defined play not only as fun but also as an opportunity for cognitive and social development.

Insert Table 1 about here

All of the teachers said they included play in the curriculum, but their descriptions of how they included it varied widely from "the entire curriculum is play" to "only if we get all our work finished." Only 20% of the teachers indicated that play was an integral part of their school day, with such responses as, play is built into the curriculum, it is used to introduce and reinforce concepts, lessons are taught using play,

and play is part of all daily routine activities.

Another 10% of teachers said that play was inherent in learning centers or interest areas, indicating that there was considerable use of play in their classrooms.

Specific play activities, such as games, dramatic play, music, songs, and rhythms were listed by 26% of the teachers as the way they included play in the curriculum. Their answers indicated they considered these play activities separate from the curriculum.

The largest group of teachers (44%) mentioned only a very specific amount of time for play and often called it free play or indoor or outdoor play. Some mentioned free play periods of a given duration, such as 20 minutes once or twice a day or a free choice time of 30 minutes a day. A few teachers used play only as a reward after work was finished. One teacher said it was very difficult to fit play into the curriculum and that it was included only if all the work was completed.

Teachers definitions of play were compared with how they said they included play in the curriculum (See Table 2). Sixty per cent of the teachers included learning in their definition of play, listing cognitive development, social development, creativity and imagination, preparation for future roles, or child's work. The other 40% defined it as unstructured activity, exercise, or fun. On the question about how play was included in

the curriculum, 51% said they integrated play into the curriculum, while 49% treated play as separate. A 2 x 2 Chi-square test of independence, using the correction for continuity, was computed on the data in Table 2 to determine the relationship between teachers' definitions of play and whether play was an integral part of their curriculum. Chi-square was not significant, (χ^2= .653, df=1, N=60), indicating a lack of relationship between the two variables. A low Phi value (ϕ=.104) was consistent with the low Chi-square, indicating negligible correlation between definitions of play and integration of play into the curriculum.

Insert Table 2 about here

In response to the question, "What do you do to promote play?", both parents and teachers listed provision of a variety of materials and equipment and participation in children's play. Teachers also listed providing time and opportunities, and providing space. Parents' responses included having friends over and turning off or limiting TV. Some parents said it wasn't necessary to do anything.(See Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

When teachers were asked what kinds of things interfered with children's play, the most frequently mentioned factors were related to adult interference, such as overprotective parents, adult criticism, and parental attitudes about play being a waste of time. Another major category was behavior and discipline problems of the children, including social and emotional problems and social attitudes and behaviors. Other factors mentioned frequently were limited equipment or supplies, rigid schedules, inadequate space, and health problems of children. A few teachers mentioned such factors as television and bad weather.

The responses from parents about what percent of time in preschool they thought should be spent in play supported the teachers' practices of limiting play. The percent of time ranged from 5% to 95%, with most of the responses at 30, 40 or 50%.

In order to see if the ages of their children influenced the percent of time they thought should be spent in play, parents' responses were grouped according to the ages of their children. As can be seen by Table 4 there was not a lot of difference among parents of 2 to 5 year olds. Even parents of two year olds thought only 53% of their children's time in preschool should be spent in play. The percentage of time parents thought six year olds should spend in play was considerably lower than the others, which is understandable in light of the even greater emphasis on academics at this age.

Insert Table 4 about here

Reasons given by parents as to why they advocated a given percent of time for play fell into three general categories. One reason was children don't need much playtime; they need to do other things. The emphasis here was on academics. The second type of reason was children need play as a break from work, emphasizing the work/play dichotomy. The third category emphasized the positive aspects of play. Play was seen as having inherent value as a learning activity. These three types of reasons were equally distributed among the parents.

Children two through six years of age were asked, "What do you think of when I say the word, play?" The largest number of responses (31%) included something to do with outdoor play, such as running, riding bikes, swinging, and sliding. Another large category of responses (27%) was playing with specific items, such as Barbie and other dolls, transformers, and cars. Other responses included organized games, playing with people, dramatic play, and art activities. Some children responded that when they thought about play, they thought of having fun, being happy, and doing things they liked.

The children were also asked what they did when they were not playing. The most frequent responses were watching

television (54%) or sleeping (21%). Other responses included eating, coloring, and nothing.

Teachers, parents, and children were all asked a similar question relating to favorite play activities and materials. Activities related to dramatic play were consistently mentioned by all three groups. Other responses included blocks, art activities, outdoor play, and organized games. Only parents frequently mentioned books and dolls as children's favorite play materials. (See Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

Many of the parents and teachers surveyed in this study did not regard play as important for young children. The lack of credence for play was evident in the parents' definitions of play and in their lack of interest in having their children spend preschool time in play, as well as in teachers' perceptions that adults were a major factor in limiting children's play. In addition, only 20% of teachers said play was an integral part of their curriculum. The rest viewed play and learning as separate entities. These parents and teachers of children two to six years of age did not view play as the way children learn. In spite of

what Piagetian theory says about how preoperational children learn through active involvement and interaction with their environment, which is facilitated through play, parents and teachers seemed to be separating play and learning into a dichotomy; children were either playing or they were learning.

Although, Almy, Monighan, Scales, & Van Horn (1984) indicate that there are still many unanswered questions about what children learn from play or how play affects their later development, research has yielded some positive findings about the relationship between play and learning. Dramatic play and make-believe play (which was named as one of children's favorite play activities in this study by parents, teachers, and children) has been found to contribute to the child's later ability to deal with abstract symbols (Fein, 1981; Pellegrini, 1980), with hypothetical reasoning (Fagen, 1976), with problem solving (Sylva, Bruner, and Genova, 1976), and to the understanding of logical transformations (Golumb & Cornelius, 1977; Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977). In addition, researchers Nicolich (1977) and Fein (1979) found there is a relationship between symbolic play and early language levels. Other researchers (Becher & Wolfgang, 1977; Rubin & Maioni, 1975; Goodson & Greenfield, 1975) found there was a correlation, not only with symbolic play and language development, but also with cognitive development. There also appears to be a continuity between symbolic skills in processes

involved in play and those required for reading and writing (Pelligrini, 1980).

Parents and teachers said they promoted children's play by providing materials, equipment, and supplies. McLoyd (1983) found that providing new materials and equipment along with removing toys and materials no longer in use or of interest to the children will indeed help to promote the continuation of interest in dramatic play. Several of the parents also said they played with their children in order to promote play. Research, such as Smilansky (1968), reinforces this practice. She not only found that intervention during the sociodramatic play episode increased play but also made the following suggestions for play intervention: enter into play as a participant; enter into play as an outside observer by asking questions and/or making suggestions, and continue to structure the environment.

More than half the preschool children said they watched television when they were not playing, supporting the current concern about the amount of time children spend watching television. The Television Bureau of Advertising (1984) reports that the average television is on for about 7 hours each day. When children are watching television they are not looking at books, communicating with friends, developing large and fine motor skills, solving problems, and asking questions, which have been found to be very important skills for future learning. Fein

(1981) and Singer & Singer (1976) found that children who watch a great deal of television play less imaginatively than those who watch less. The available research suggests that parents should limit the amount of time their children watch television instead of being concerned that they spend too much time playing.

Outdoor play and dramatic play were by far children's favorite play activities. Teachers listed blocks, dramatic play, art activities and outdoor play as chidren's favorite activities, while parents said children liked outdoor play, art, and dramatic play. It appears from this study that the activities that children like most are not those that require expensive toys such as motorized trucks, dolls that walk or talk, or other electronic gadgetry. Television advertising tries to persuade children that they need toys with special effects and gimmicks, but the novelty of these expensive toys soon wears off. Materials such as blocks, sand and water, crayons and scissors, dolls, wheel toys, and dress up clothes can be used creatively by children in many ways and have lasting play value. It is important that early childhood educators provide information to parents about what kinds of toys and materials have good play value so they are able to help children resist advertising pressure.

There is also a need to communicate to parents, (and, in some cases, to teachers as well), the importance of including play as an integral part of the preschool curriculum. We know

that play does facilitate certain types of learning. It provides children with opportunities for social development, learning language, gaining independence, solving problems, developing large and fine motor skills, assuming responsibility, experimenting and discovering, and developing imaginative and creative minds. Considering the lack of interest in play in the preschool setting, as described in this study, one has to be concerned about the emphasis on academic skills and the effect it might have on the total development of children.

REFERENCES

Almy, M., Monighan, P., Scales, B., & Van Horn, J. (1984). Recent research on play: The teacher's perspective. In L. Katz (Ed.), Current topics in early childhood education. New York: Ablex.

Becher, R. & Wolfgang, C. (1977). An exploration of the relationship between symbolic representation in dramatic play and art in the cognitive and reading readiness levels of kindergarten children. Psychology in the Schools, 14, 377-381.

Cheyne, J., & Rubin, K. (1983). Playful precursors of problem solving in preschoolers. Developmental Psychology, 19, 577-84.

Christie, J., & Johnson, E. (1983). The role of play in a social-intellectual development. Review of Educational Research, 53(1), 93-115.

Fagen, R. (1976). Modeling: How and why it works. In J. Bruner, A Jolly, & k. Sylva (Eds.), Play: Its role in development and evolution. New York: Basic Books.

Fein, G. (1979). Echoes from the nursery: Piaget, Vygotsky, and the relationship between language and play. In E. Winner & H. Gardner (Eds.), Fact, fiction and fantasy in childhood San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Fein, G. (1981). Pretend play in childhood: An integrative review. Child development, 52, 1095-1118.

Golumb, C. & Cornelius, C. (1977). Symbolic play and cognitive significance. Developmental Psychology, 13, 246-252.

Goodson, B. & Greenfield, P. (1975). The search for structural principles in children's manipulative play: A parallel with linguistic development. Child Development, 46, 734-746.

Harris, W.T. (Ed.)(1906). The mottoes and commentaries of Frederich Froebel's mother play. New York: Appleton.

Iverson, B. (1982). Play, creativity, and school today. Phi Delta Kappan, 63(10), 693-94.

McLoyd, V. (1983). The effects of the structure of play objects on the pretend play of low-income preschool children. Child Development, 54, 626-35.

Mitchell, E., & Mason, B. (1948). The theory of play. New York: Barnes.

Nicholic, L. (1977). Beyond sensorimotor intelligence: Assessment of symbolic maturity. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 23, 89-99.

Piaget, J. (1962). Play, dreams and imitations in childhood. New York: Norton.

Pelligrini, A. (1980). The relationship between kindergartener's play and achievement in prereading, language, and writing. Psychology in the Schools, 17, 530-535.

Rubin, K. & Maioni, T. (1975). Play preference and its relationship to egocentrism, popularity, and classification skills in preschoolers. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 25, 171-179.

Saltz, E., Dixon, D., & Johnson, J. (1977). Training disadvantaged preschoolers on various fantasy activities: Effects on cognitive functioning and impulse control. Child Development, 48, 367-380.

Smilansky, S. (1968). The efffects of sociodramatic play on disadvataged preschool children. New York: Wiley.

Sylva, K., Bruner, J., & Genove, S. (1976). The role of play in the problem-solving of children 3-5 years old. In J. Bruner, A. Jolly, & S. Sylva (Eds.), Play: Its role in development and evolution. New York; Basic Books.

Television Bureau of Advertising. (1984). January 1984 Report. 477 Madison Avenue, New York, New York, 10022.

Tway, E. (1983). When will my child write? Childhood Education, 59(5), 332-35.

Table 1

Teachers' and Parents' Definitions of Play

Definitions	Teachers	Parents
Enjoyment, fun, amusement	20%	31%
Social development	20%	8%
Cognitive development	18%	14%
Physical activity	12%	8%
Creativity and imagination	10%	25%
Non-structured activity	8%	6%
Preparation for future roles	8%	5%
Child's work	4%	3%

Table 2

Relationship Between Teachers' Definitions of Play and Integration of Play into the Curriculum

	Play defined as some type of learning	Play as fun, exercise, or free activity
Play integrated into the curriculum	13	5
Play as separate times or activities	22	20

Table 3

How Teachers and Parents Promote Children's Play

	Teachers	Parents
Provide materials and equipment	46%	48%
Participate in and encourage play	12%	35%
Provide time and opportunities	27%	-
Provide space	15%	
Not necessary to do anything	-	9%
Have friends over	-	5%
Turn off TV	-	3%

Table 4

Average Percent of Preschool Time Parents Thought Should Be Spent in Play

Age of child	Percent of time for play
Six years old	30%
Five years old	49%
Four years old	42%
Three years old	49%
Two years old	53%

Table 5

Children's Favorite Play Activities and Materials
As Reported by Teachers, Parents, and Children

	Teachers	Parents	Children
Outdoor play	25	62	47
Housekeeping,dramatic play	34	36	39
Blocks and legos	35	18	9
Art activities	32	50	7
Organized games	18	11	13
Puzzles	12	9	0
Table toys	12	0	0
Sand, water, and rice	11	7	2
Musical activities	10	13	0
Books and stories	8	28	2
Balls	7	14	19
Dolls	3	22	4
Television	0	11	0
Trucks, cars, boats, planes	4	14	3
Transformers	0	5	0
Action figures	0	10	0
Video games	0	4	0
Total responses	211	314	145